

Fact Sheet #4 - Coffee Makers

BNL Fire Safety Engineering Group reports that there have been several coffee pot “meltdowns” over the years. All were due to the coffee maker being left plugged in, the coffee evaporating out, and the over-temperature sensor failing to limit the hotplate’s temperature. Fortunately, none of these meltdowns have resulted in significant fires due to their locations on non-combustible surfaces and fire detection in the area. Here is a summary of rules for safe electric coffee maker operation:

1. Electric coffee makers should be UL listed. If it is an older pot, check the Consumer Product Safety Commission web site to see if it has a recall <http://www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/prod.aspx> (pick “coffeemakers” from the left hand column, click the find button). When purchasing a new coffeemaker, choose a model with an automatic shutoff feature.
2. Place the coffee maker on a non-combustible surface, and keep combustibles away from it (ex. drapers, paper towels).
3. Ensure coffee makers are turned off at the end of the workday (even those with automatic shutoffs). Assigning a person to unplug it from the electrical outlet is the best method of ensuring that it is off. Use of timers is not a guaranteed safety improvement. Timers can turn equipment on after-hours, they

do not adjust for holidays, and they are affected by power outages. This would be a good time to check the GFCI receptacle to ensure it works.

4. If coffeemakers cause the circuit breaker to trip, disconnect power loads on the circuit immediately. Have the power circuits examined by F&O Electricians before resuming using it.

Electric baseboard and space heaters are also a safety concern in cold weather. For your safety, review the following BNL Emergency Services information on Portable Heaters in SBMS at: https://sbms.bnl.gov/sbmsearch/subjarea/178/178_pro1.cfm#1.1.

